**How important are the evaluation questions to the evaluation?**

They are one of the most important parts of the evaluation because without asking the right questions, the evaluation may be lacking the right answers and can leave people frustrated and be a waste of time and money.

**How do we choose evaluation questions?**

Question identification falls into two phases:

* Divergent-a comprehensive list of questions and concerns that is drafted to consider all possibilities
  + Identifying the appropriate sources for questions
    - Stakeholders
    - Heuristics which are a base of understanding that already exists such as an evaluation approach-looking to something similar we already know of
    - Research and evaluation work in the field
    - Professional standards, checklists, guidelines or criteria
    - Expert consultants
    - Evaluator professional judgment
    - Examination of information gathered from multiple sources
* Convergent**-** questions are selected from the comprehensive list that will focus the evaluation on critical areas
  + Narrowing down the questions through the use of criteria for the use in the final evaluation
  + Consider things such as the impact the answer to the question would have on the final outcome of the evaluation and whether or not the answer to the question would reveal new and useful information, etc.

**Why is it important for the evaluator to remain flexible during an evaluation?**

Some questions or criteria remain important during the evaluation period, but as changes occur as the evaluation is on-going, other questions or concerns might become less important or answer themselves.

**What are the possible designs (organization or structure used for data collection) that can be used in evaluation?**

* Identifying appropriate sources of information
* Identifying the appropriate methods for collecting information

**What might be an appropriate way to report evaluation findings?**

It may be useful to construct a matrix that outlines for each question:

* The audience
* The context included
* The reporting format
* Date of the report
* Context in which the report was presented

**What things would be included in a good management plan?**

* The tasks to be performed and the time lines for each task
* The personnel and other resources required to complete the task
* The cost

**What are some common designs used for collecting information?**

* Case studies are the most commonly used, rely heavily on qualitative data
* Experimental design
  + Post-test only-least complicated
  + Pre-post design-using a pre-test to ensure the equivalency of groupings or the pre-test can be used as a benchmark to report changes that occurred
* Quasi-experimental design-used when random sampling is not feasible
  + Interrupted time
  + Non-equivalent comparison group design
  + Regression-discontinuity design
* Selected descriptive designs
  + Cross-sectional design shows a “snapshot in time”
  + Time-series design shows trends or changes over time

**What is sampling?**

A method used to select units of people, etc. to study. There are 4 types:

* Purposive sampling- sample is drawn based on particular purposes or judgments
* Random sampling-each unit has an equal and independent chance of being selected
* Stratified random sampling-used when looking at differences among subgroups
* Cluster sampling-used to cover large geographic regions in a cost effective way

**Whose responsibility is cost analysis when doing an evaluation?** It is the evaluator’s responsibility to bring the attention of costs to the administration in charge of an evaluation.

There was a lot of information included in these three chapters; it seems difficult to find a starting point. My first thought is with the evaluation questions and the difficulty of coming up with them and narrowing them down. It seems like it would be overwhelming to try to narrow down and eliminate from the divergent list to the convergent list. How does one decide what is important and what is not? According to Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthen (2004) “No evaluation can answer responsibly all the questions generated during a thorough, divergent planning phase.” (p. 246) I can see being able to eliminate those questions that overlap each other and those that are already answered in the process. I guess it is important to keep the evaluation focus as narrow as possible and try not to get sidetracked.

The closest I have ever come to experience with this was during the final development stages of the grade 12 English standards exam in Manitoba. Every year two exam packages are developed by a committee of teachers, consultants and other department related staff. Schools across the province will volunteer to pilot the exams in March/April. All of these exams are sent in to a central location for marking and a team of teachers from across the province will come together mark the exams and record information as to any problems they see, things they liked, any errors that they see, the questions that they did not feel matched up with the curriculum outcomes they were matched with, etc. The data collected was then narrowed down from this huge mass of divergent materials to a smaller workable and organized list of convergent issues and questions. Things were eliminated from the list for different reasons. Some other concerns or issues were eliminated because they could not be changed due to political and statistical guidelines that the committee had to follow. All other issues on the convergent list were taken back to the test development committee for full review. All concerns, questions and issues were taken into consideration and changes are made to the exams before they are sent out to the general field for use in the years to come.

Another part of the process that seemed like it could be difficult and overwhelming was identifying the sources of information. There seems like so many directions that an evaluator could go. Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthen (2004) state, “Each evaluation question requires the collection of information on at least one variable, if not more.” (p.264) for each question being focused on, you need at least one or more sources of information. Of course it makes sense to start with the program administrator. We hope they would be the primary source for information. There are many secondary sources to choose from.

I did not really consider that there would be policies restricting the information sources that could be used. It would also be important to be aware of these policies that may get in the way of the evaluation. There would be no sense in spending valuable time and money pursuing something that would not be able to be used as data in the end anyway.

I am not sure why I never really thought of this because I already mentioned that our test development committee was bound by preset policies and guidelines that we were not allowed to change. We had to stay true to the expected statistics as far as types of questions, what percentage of test questions could tied to each outcome area, numbers of male/female authors, expected aboriginal content and many other things. Of course there would be policies that would restrict some choices of the evaluation process

I also never really thought of an evaluator having ethical principles to adhere to, but it makes sense as well. There would be many ethical issues involved in any evaluation and it would be easy to get into areas that might be considered unethical. According to Morris (1998) most evaluators have a strong ethical ideal but, “…that ideal is often challenged by a variety of political, personal and financial factors that could—if allowed—compromise that ideal and undermine the high ethical standards that must be maintained if evaluation is to serve well it purpose(s) in society.” (p.223)

The other issues that could be difficult, but important, to avoid would be issues of confidentiality and anonymity. Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthen(2004) state, “If certain potentially harmful information may be subpoenaed later, the evaluator should consider whether it is necessary to collect it in the first place.” (p.267)

The reporting of data may also be difficult. It seems like it would be a large amount of information to organize into a readable and meaningful document. The use of a matrix was a good idea. I liked the idea of listing the questions and using the other column headings to correspond with each important element in the plan. It is important to keep all audiences of the information in mind and organize the information so that each audience could access and understand the relative information.

Time, they say, equals money, so it is easy to see how any evaluation could get time consuming and costly without careful planning and monitoring. A good management plan would help with this. Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthen (2004) state, “a management plan is needed to structure and control resources, including time, money and people.” (p.277) A budget would be necessary and would have to be set up to reflect the different categories of the evaluation. There are some cost saving measures that could be used such as using volunteers or local specialists for data gathering to reduce the costs of wages and mileage.

It also seems like it would be difficult to decide which designs to use in the gathering of information. There are so many different design choices. I guess it might just seem so overwhelming because I am not thinking of a particular evaluation when I am reading the chapters. The ideas seem so abstract and unorganized without a specific thing in mind to focus my thinking. If I had a specific program evaluation in mind, some of the choices would be eliminated or chosen by the very nature of the evaluation itself.

References

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